

The Athenian Mercury.

Saturday, December 21. 1695.

Quest. 1. **W** Hether or no do Fishes think?

Ans. We were about to say, as much as some men, and shou'd be tempted to conclude it of them as well as some other Animals, did we believe that Reason were not the Essence of Man, or that 'twas common with him to the Brutes, only, *secundum magis* and *minus*; which we shall believe when we hear any Beast speak, for we can never yet find, but the Fishes and they are much alike famous for Elocution, since even the Meermen and Meermaids which have been several times taken, tho they seem to have been much more Docible than any Brute Creature on the Land, not so much as excepting Mr. Peter's Prophecying Ape, who was far out-done by the Harlem Maid, who, they tell us, was taught to Spin, yet neither she nor any of her kin cou'd ever be taught any Language, by all the care that has been us'd with 'em, continuing still as Mute as the Proverb represents 'em, not that it reaches all of 'em in the strictest Sense, for tho they can't speak, there's some of 'em will roar very Audibly, particularly the wounded Whale, so as to be heard almost a League from the place of Battle. But tho they cry some of 'em loud enough, we know nothing of their Laughing: And yet, tho we can't grant a Fish any more Thought, than he has Speech, or Laughter, or Reason, there are some of 'em must be own'd to have strong Imagination, and others at least as notable Instincts as any thing that's Irrational on our own Element, if in some Instances they don't exceed 'em. The Sea Horse, and River Horse, which if they are not the same species are yet extremely alike, have strange Instincts, whereby they preserve their own beings and offend their Enemies. For whether or no that be true which some report of 'em, that they were the first Inventors of Blood-letting, rolling their tender Bellies on the sharp Reeds, and thereby letting themselves blood when they are gorg'd and surfeited; this is certain, that they observe a sort of Military order amongst 'em; for when they lie a sleep on the Ice about Greenland, they carefully set a Centinel, who gives the Alarm on the approach of the Enemy, striking his next Neighbour on his long Tusk, who does the same to his, and so the Alarm immediately runs through the whole Army, who make with all their Force towards the Edge of the Ice, and plunge down together to break it with their weight, and escape their Enemy; thus they often make a Good Retreat, the most difficult part in the whole Art of War. We remember we mention'd above, the Strength of Imagination in Fishes, whereof we shall give at present but one Instance; 'tis to be found in Swammerdams Notes on Van Horns Prodrumus, where he tells us, that he himself saw a small Shell Fish, which the Latins call Turben, from its form, we a Wink, or Winkle, fasten'd to the upper Shell of an Oyster, and growing to it in such a manner that the upper part of the Shell, under which the Fish did inhabit, had a sort of a protuberance, or swelling in the Inside, as if it gave way to the weight above it, tho all the rest of the shell was smooth and Equal. But on the contrary, the under shell, which had nothing to do with this Interloper, that sat on the Ridge of the poor Oysters House, like a Thrasher on a Whale; had yet, on its outer side, the perfect Form and Colour of that Fish, which the observer himself, with good reason, refers to the Power of Imagination, since nothing else cou'd be assign'd that shou'd alter the external Face of the under shell in that manner. But if from all this, or any other Instances of the same Nature, either in Beast, Fish, or Bird, any shou'd conclude that those Creatures can properly think, affirm, deny, compound, divide, make Syllogisms, form abstracted notions, or have any

notion of universals, or any thing but what's sensible and singular, we think they may as reasonably affirm that Beasts and Fowls may live and grow fat at the bottom of the Sea, or Whales turn flying Fishes, and Nestle on the Tops of Mountains.

Quest. 2. Pray what Language did the 4 Evangelists write in, and whether, as some affirm, was St. Matthews Gospel at first written in Hebrew?

Ans. Concerning St. Matthews Gospel, we think we have formerly answer'd, but however shall here examin it more largely. There are Authors of great Learning both Ancient and Modern, who make no doubt at all of its having been at first written in Hebrew: Among the Ancients, Irenaeus, Origen, Chrysostom, Eusebius Epiphanius, Theophilus. But none so plainly as St. Jerom, who mentions it in several places, and says expressly he had both seen, read, and even Translated it. In his Catal. Scriptor, Part. 2. Ep. 67. 'Mattheus, qui et Levi, &c. Matthew, who was also call'd Levi, an Apostle from a Publican, did for the sake of those of the Circumcision which believ'd, first of all in Indea, write the Gospel of Christ in Hebrew Letters and Words. He goes on, 'Tis yet to be seen in Hebrew in the Library of Casarea, nay, he adds further, that he himself had the Liberty of Transcribing it from the Nazareans at Barea in Syria, who us'd no other. And again he mentions another Copy of it, which was brought by Pantenus the Philosopher out of the Judies, whither St. Bartholomew himself had carry'd it: Among the Moderns, Grotius is very positive in the same opinion, and Dr. Hammond seems not to make the least doubt of it, being sway'd, its probable, as well by the general vote of the Ancients, as by two, which are already publick, Manuscripts of great Antiquity, which he quotes at the Beginning of his Paraphrase on this Gospel, both which agree that 'twas writ in the Hebrew Tongue by St. Matthew at Jerusalem, for those of the believing Jews which there inhabited: Against this 'tis as strongly urg'd by others, that 'tis not probable St. Matthew shou'd write in Hebrew, for the sake of the Jews, when the main Body of 'em had so far lost their old Language that they were forc'd to have Paraphrases in the Chaldee even to understand the Scriptures, which are generally granted to have been written some time before our Saviour. They further urge that if there ever were any such Gospel at first written by St. Matthew in the Hebrew Language, 'tis very probable 'twas lost before St. Jeroms time, and he impos'd upon by some Spurious Gospel of the Ebionites, which is own'd by all, even by Epiphanius himself, to have been extremely deprav'd and corrupted. Again, Erasmus in his Apology urges, that it appears from St. Jerom himself, that there were two Volumes of this pretended Gospel, one written in the Chaldee or Syrian speech, but in the Hebrew Letters, which he mentions in his discourse against the Pelagians; the other which he says was wrote in the Hebrew Tongue, and with Hebrew Words and Letters: As to the first of these objections, thus much seems plain, that it cou'd not be the old Hebrew Language, viz. That which was us'd in the sacred Books, of the Old Testament, in which St. Matthew first wrote his Gospel, any more than we are to suppose 'twas that Language in which Christ's Title was written, or St. Paul spoke to the Jews, both which the Scripture tells us was Hebrew; which must therefore be in such Hebrew as was then intelligible, and vulgarly spoken amongst 'em as was then the Syriack only, or a Language confounded out of the Chaldee and old Hebrew, at that time commonly spoken at Jerusalem; for otherwise how cou'd this Gospel be said to be written for the sake of the Jews who dwelt there,

unless they could understand it, which they might well do if it were *Syriack*, but could not, it may be, one of a thousand, had it been the old *Hebrew*; and of this opinion is *Grotius*, who explains *Hebraice* by *Syriace*, as well as *Widmanstadius*, and several other Learned men. And this clears the other difficulty from *St. Jerom's* words, for he did, no doubt, in one place speak with the *Vulgar*, and call that the *Hebrew Tongue* which was then spoke by the *Hebrews*, as we now talk *English* tho perhaps more different from the old *Anglo-Saxon* Language than the *Syriack* from the *Hebrew*. Tho in that other expression of *St. Jerom*, in his piece against the *Pelagians*, he expresses himself more accurately, when he says this Gospel was written in the *Chaldee*, or *Syrian Speech*, but in the *Hebrew Letters*. Wherein there yet remains some difficulty, for there's little doubt but the *Murrhaba*, or square Letters, which the *Hebrews* chose after the *Babylonish Captivity*, leaving their old Character to the *Samaritans*, was no other than that which they learnt from the *Chaldeans* and which they still retain: To this 'tis answered that as the *Jews* chang'd their Character in the time of *Esdra's* to distinguish themselves from the *Samaritans*, so did the *Christians* at least the *Orthodox* change theirs after they embrac'd *Christianity*, on purpose to distinguish themselves from the *Jews*, or *Judaizing Christians*, afterwards call'd *Nazarenes*, who it seems mingled with the *Ebionites* and were many of 'em infected with their *Errors*. However some even of those appear by Church *Historians* to have been *Orthodox* in all but their observing the *Law*, which they did till the time of *Adrian*; at least to have run so far from the *Errors of Ebion* as to fall into the contrary *extrem*; for they had, it's very probable, several *Assurances* to their Gospel, not written by *St. Matthew*, but deliver'd by word of mouth, which were afterwards added by them whereas it's certain from *Epiphanius*, that the *Ebionites* Gospel was *main'd* and *imperfet*; and that they struck out all the 1st Cap. of *St. John's* Gospel to the 19^v. This is the record of *John*, omitting all which that Divine writer so accurately advances concerning the *Divinity* and *Eternity* of the *Sea of God*, having not, it seems, then found out the way which our *Modern Ebionites* take to evade the force of such express Texts, whence we may see who have most reason to complain of *Corruption* of the *Ancients*, they or we, and we take leave to propose this as a Conjecture to the Learned. Whether that strange omission in the 1st *Timoth.* 3 and last, which seems to us unavoidably to make a great part of what follows perfect *Nonsense*, in the *Syriack* and some other Copies, might not be owing to the practice of some of these *Ebionites* in the 1st ages of *Christianity*? All the objections therefore which have been yet brought against this almost unanimous Tradition of the *Ancients*, may from what we have already advanc'd, admit of a tolerable answer. Nor can we suppose that *Jerom* could be so easily deceiv'd in this matter, in three several Instances. Now, if *St. Matthew's* Gospel were written in *Hebrew*, and *St. Mark's* in *Greek*, one would be tempted to suspect that *St. Luke's* was written in *Latin*, the 3 famous Languages then in the World as our *Saviours Title* on the Cross, which in spite of the *Jews*, contain'd so great a part of the Gospel, was also written in those 3 Languages: As for *St. John*, 'twas written some years after and on a particular occasion, but for *St. Luke*, the *Ancients* say he wrote at *Rome*, and that his Book, *ἱεραὺς καὶ ποιητικὸς ὁμιλεῖται*, tho this we confess, may as well refer to the *Italick stile* or manner of writing us'd among some of the *Greeks*, as to the *Latin Language* then generally spoken in *Italy*.

However we must own 'tis the general received opinion, that all the 4 Gospels as well as the rest of the New Testament were writ Originally in *Greek*, which the very Learned *Lightsfoot* embraces and strongly defends. For *Greek* then was little less than the *Universal Language*, being spread much farther than the

Roman, even in spite of their *Conquests*. nay, was used even in *Jerusalem* it self in *Sacreds*, having been render'd more easy and familiar to 'em by the *Seventy's Translation*, to that degree that not only *Moses* was read, and prayers said in that Language as well in, as out of *Palestine*, but even their *Philacteries* were repeated in it, the most sacred part of their Law as the fore-mention'd learned person proves out of the *Rabbis*; and thus much concerning these questions.

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